The Implementation and Impact of the Laïcité System on the Development of Islamophobia in France

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ABSTRACT

Secularism is an ideology that seeks to maintain a clear separation between religion and the state. France is a prominent example of a country adhering to this ideology, reinforced by the laïcité policy, which forms the foundation of French secularism. This article employs a qualitative research method, specifically a literature review of various secondary data sources, to critically examine the role of secularism in France and its contribution to the emergence of Islamophobia in public life. The findings indicate that the implementation of the laïcité policy, particularly as a counter-terrorism measure following the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center (WTC) in the United States, has fostered an excessive concern over Muslims, who are frequently associated with terrorism. Consequently, Islamophobia has manifested in France through various forms of discrimination, physical and verbal violence, and hate speech, all of which pose significant threats to the security of Muslim communities in the country. Therefore, while secularism is intended to guarantee freedom for individuals to practice their religion without state interference, the situation in France reveals that secularism has, in fact, imposed restrictions on the practice of Islam.

Keywords: Terrorism, Laicite, Islamophobia, and France.

ABSTRAK

Sekularisme merupakan ideologi yang berupaya menjaga pemisahan yang jelas antara agama dan negara. Prancis merupakan contoh menonjol dari negara yang menganut ideologi ini, yang diperkuat oleh kebijakan laïcité, yang menjadi dasar dari sekularisme Prancis. Artikel ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif, khususnya tinjauan pustaka dari berbagai sumber data sekunder, untuk secara kritis mengkaji peran sekularisme di Prancis dan kontribusinya terhadap munculnya Islamofobia dalam kehidupan publik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa penerapan kebijakan laïcité, terutama sebagai langkah kontra-terorisme setelah serangan 11 September 2001 di World Trade Center (WTC) di Amerika Serikat, telah memicu kekhawatiran yang berlebihan terhadap umat Muslim, yang seringkali dikaitkan dengan terorisme. Akibatnya, Islamofobia telah terwujud di Prancis melalui berbagai bentuk diskriminasi, kekerasan fisik dan verbal, serta ujaran kebencian, yang semuanya mengancam keamanan komunitas Muslim di

negara tersebut. Oleh karena itu, meskipun sekularisme dimaksudkan untuk menjamin kebebasan individu dalam menjalankan agama tanpa campur tangan negara, situasi di Prancis justru mengungkap bahwa sekularisme telah membatasi praktik agama Islam.

Keywords: Terorisme, Laicite, Islamophobia, dan Prancis.

INTRODUCTION

Islam is one of the fastest-growing religions globally, particularly in Europe during the 20th century. The increasing number of Muslim immigrants and their influence across Europe are clear indicators of this growth. More people are becoming familiar with Islam, and Islamic symbols are increasingly visible in various European countries. As Christianity and Catholicism are the dominant religions on the continent, their followers have gradually started to accept the presence of Muslims. However, the rapid expansion of Islam has sparked concern among some Western individuals, leading governments to implement policies out of fear regarding the rising visibility of Muslim identity.

Islam's presence in France dates back to the 18th and early 20th centuries, with the construction of the prominent Grand Mosque of Paris in 1922 as a significant milestone. The influx of Muslim immigrants from North Africa, particularly following World Wars I and II, contributed to the growing Muslim population in the country. France's historical context reveals its foundation as a secular state, established by the nobility and the Catholic Church, with the principle that religion should not interfere with state affairs. The country's motto of Liberté (freedom), Égalité (equality), and Fraternité (brotherhood) has fostered a societal belief that issues of ethnicity and religion are taboo, and that religion is a collective identity (Putri & Imaduddin, 2021). Consequently, individual identity is often prioritized over collective religious identity.

This secular mindset and the principle of freedom of expression have placed Muslims in France under threat. In the 1970s, a new wave of Muslim immigrants arrived in France, this time in the form of students seeking education. The presence of these students became a crucial factor in the spread of Islam. However, the presence of Muslims, such as these students, in European countries has often posed a dilemma for local authorities, particularly concerning employment, labor issues, and social problems. Muslims in France face pressure and discrimination stemming from government policies and the anti-Islamic attitudes of French society. One notable government measure is the law banning conspicuous displays of religious symbols and identities in public spaces and state schools. This situation underscores the ongoing tension between France and the Muslim community.

Muslims expressed frustration and disappointment with President Emmanuel Macron's statements, which they perceived as denigrating the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and associating Muslims with radicalism. Although Macron referred to radical Islam and mentioned Samuel Paty as a target, the French government's policies, such as the ban on conspicuous religious symbols in public spaces and state schools, have exacerbated pressure and discrimination against Muslims. The prohibition on wearing prominent religious symbols in public and in state schools illustrates the persistent tension between France and the Muslim community.

Given the tension in France between Muslims, the government, and Islamophobic sentiments among the population, this study aims to delve deeper into the state of secularism and Islamophobia in France, as well as to analyze the implications of the policy banning religious symbols and the broader impact of this prohibition.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Secularism

Secularism is an ideology that developed in Europe, driven by the absolute dominance of the church, which often acted discriminatorily towards society, particularly through the persecution and execution of scholars and scientists. This led to a movement towards secularization, aiming to break away from the past and embrace a new world (Syahadha, 2020). Secularism can be defined as an idea that seeks to separate religion and the state, maintaining a neutral stance (Paranrangi, 2010). The underlying belief is that religion represents the relationship between individuals and the divine, while the state governs relationships among people within a societal structure based on a social contract. Therefore, it is believed that religion and the state should have separate rules. Religion is regarded as a private matter for citizens, which neither governs nor is governed by the state, and likewise, religion should not influence the state. In secular states, the legal system and positive norms are separated from religious values or norms, with laws being determined by human consensus rather than divine commandments. In such states, citizens are generally free to adhere to any religion without state interference in their religious matters (Hisyam, 2017).

Harvey Cox argues that secularism strongly aligns with the teachings of the Bible, which provides three essential components that underpin secularism (Sari & Rahma, 2022). These components include: the notion of an inconsistent nature, which entails the removal of spiritual values in understanding nature to prevent the development of science and modernization from being hindered by beliefs in an external force controlling the world; the desanctification of politics, which refers to the exclusion of spiritual elements from politics to facilitate better political and social change; and the relativization of religious absolutes, meaning that truth becomes relative and subjective to individual perception. Cox further differentiates between secularism, secularization, and secular, where secularism refers to an ideology or worldview that seeks to distance all aspects of life, including the state, from religious influences (Fata & Noorhayati, 2016). Secularization refers to the process of liberating human life from religious control, aiming to remove closed worldviews. The term secular is simply defined as worldly. Thus, secularism is an ideology or worldview that emerges from the process of secularization, resulting in a secular society within the state, and the three concepts are closely related to the separation of religion and state (Sari & Rahma, 2022).

Islamophobia

Islam is one of the world's largest religions, emphasizing teachings of peace and safety for all creation, or "rahmatan lil 'alamin" (Irpan et al., 2021). However, various events have occurred where Islam has been misrepresented as the root cause of these incidents. The term "Islamophobia" is familiar to people in the West, particularly in the United States and Europe, where Islamic communities or groups are often labeled as terrorists (Moordiningsih, 2004). Islamophobia involves attitudes or behaviors that encompass emotional, evaluative, and cognitive elements, often leading to

discriminatory actions. The origins of Islamophobia lie in racism, which evolved into discrimination and sentiments against Islam and Muslims (Allen, 2017; Bleich, 2012; Ciftci, 2012; Frost, 2008; Gholami, 2021; Mondon & Winter, 2017). The term "Islamophobia" was first used by the Runnymede Trust in 1997 to describe discrimination, harassment, and social and structural harm against Muslims (Allen, 2017). Specifically, Allen (2017) defines Islamophobia as a fabricated fear or prejudice ingrained in individuals' minds by the global Eurocentric and Orientalist power structures. Violence is often used as a tool to target Muslims in economic, political, social, and cultural spheres, which fosters fear and prejudice whenever Islam is mentioned.

Erik Bleich (2012) further defines Islamophobia as a form of social anxiety and rejection of anything related to Islam, including its culture, groups, and individuals, based on prejudice and stereotypes. Islamophobia is not limited to Western countries with liberal democracies; it has spread globally (Bleich, 2012). Anti-Muslim violence and racism are exacerbated by state policies and media campaigns that target Islam within political contexts (Frost, 2008; Gholami, 2021). Muslims who wear traditional attire, such as niqabs, burqas, and long garments, or have beards, are often targeted by Islamophobic individuals. The tragic events of September 11, 2001, significantly worsened perceptions of Islam among American and European societies. Muslims around the world have experienced verbal and nonverbal violence due to the fear and prejudice of non-Muslims, stemming from the attacks that killed nearly 3,000 people at the World Trade Center (WTC). The fundamental reasons for Islamophobia in Europe include the failure of state policies to ensure and protect equal rights for all societal groups, including Muslims, the scapegoating of Islam during economic recessions, and violent incidents or tragedies associated with Islam by terrorist groups, which have heightened public fear and anxiety (Pradipta, 2016). Ciftci (2012) identifies eight components of Islamophobia: viewing Islam as static, monolithic, and unresponsive to change; perceiving Islam as separate and alien; considering Islam inferior to the West, barbaric, primitive, irrational, and sexist; associating Islam with violence, aggression, and terrorism; using Islam as a political ideology for political and military gain; rejecting Western criticism of Islam; justifying discriminatory practices and the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream society through hostility towards Islam; and normalizing and legitimizing hostility towards Islam (Ciftci, 2012).

METHOD

The selection of an appropriate research methodology is crucial for the success of any study, as the chosen method aids researchers in addressing the research problem and achieving the objectives of the study. This research employs a qualitative methodology to explore the research issues in depth. Qualitative research is conducted in a natural setting, where the researcher acts as the key instrument. This method involves data collection through various techniques, inductive data analysis, and the findings emphasize meaning over generalization (Sugiyono, 2013). According to Bogdan and Taylor, qualitative methods generate descriptive data, both verbal and written, derived from individuals and their behavior under study (Moleong, 2014). The use of this qualitative approach is supported by the researcher's comprehensive theoretical knowledge and broad insights, which are essential for sourcing and analyzing information, focusing on meaning and being value-bound. Consequently, qualitative

research methodology centers on understanding social life problems based on the complex, detailed, and holistic reality of the subject matter (Murdiyanto, 2020).

There are various techniques for data collection in qualitative research. The primary aim of these techniques is to gather as much information as possible to ensure the success of the study. Information sources can be obtained directly from respondents, through direct observation, or from official documents. This research is strengthened and supported by accurate and coherent data, collected through literature review or library research methods. Literature review is a data collection method that involves examining books, literature, records, and reports related to the research topic (Nazir, 1988). This approach provides a foundation based on written opinions that form the basis of the study. Additionally, literature review methods help acquire secondary data, which is used to compare theoretical perspectives with practical field data. Secondary data can be obtained from internet browsing, previous research findings, lecture notes, and other relevant sources. The collected data are then analyzed and processed to form the basis of the research. By utilizing a literature review, researchers can more easily establish a theoretical foundation aimed at developing theoretical aspects, thereby broadening the researcher's knowledge base and facilitating the analysis of the research problem.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Secularism and Islamophobia in France

Islamophobia is closely linked to negative prejudices against Muslims, which can disrupt or threaten their social standing. This issue is also influenced by the fluctuating relationship between the state and religion. One significant aspect of this relationship is the separation of religion from the state. France, as a secular country, adheres to secularism with the aim of ensuring equality for all its citizens, regardless of religion, ethnicity, race, or origin, before the law (Monsma et al., 2017). The introduction of the 1905 French Law, known as The Act of 1905, marked the beginning of secularism in France. This law guarantees religious freedom while ensuring that no religion receives official support or recognition from the French government (Alvillar, 2020). As a result, no particular group is given dominance or special treatment, allowing for fair representation of the general populace. In France, secularism is referred to as laïcité, which signifies the nation's commitment to neutrality and non-interference in religious practices. However, there is no definitive definition of laïcité according to the Conseil d'Etat's 2004 report, Un siècle de laïcité (The Local Fr, 2019). Officially incorporated into the French Constitution in 1958, laïcité is enshrined in 89 articles.

Recent events involving individuals with radical Islamic backgrounds have complicated the state of secularism in France and negatively affected the Muslim community. For example, attacks near a satirical magazine's office led to proposals for specific legislation targeting Islamist and radical elements. This proposal was advanced by Imam Chems Eddine Hafiz of the Paris Mosque and other members of the French Mosque Council, who met with President Emmanuel Macron on September 25, 2020. Continuous attacks in France have heightened public unrest. On October 2, 2020, President Macron announced plans to strengthen laïcité and combat Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism (Islam Lumieres) (detik.com, 2020). The proposed draft revision of the law to reinforce laïcité has sparked academic debate. Olivier Roy contends that Islam itself is not radical, but that radical fundamentalist groups misuse Islam to justify their actions. Conversely, Gilles Kepel argues that the problems arising from fundamentalist groups stem from Islamic doctrine (Nubowo, 2020).

President Macron has actively supported his cabinet in passing the Anti-Separatism Bill (Separatisme Religieux), which is intended to combat religious radicalism and extremism (Sicca, 2020). The emergence of this bill has sparked debate about secularism in France, with Macron's stance appearing to exhibit Islamophobic tendencies. The application of secularism in France complicates the daily activities of Muslim individuals in public spaces. According to Paul Silverstein (2008), Islamophobia results from the contrasting characteristics between Arab or Middle Eastern identities and European culture. Colonialism, marginalization, and international events have contributed to the rise of Islamophobia in France. The relationship between North Africa and France has significantly influenced the presence of immigrants in France. Additionally, socioeconomic marginalization of immigrants in French suburbs has led to turmoil and resistance from North African immigrants, who are predominantly Muslim. This situation has generated anxiety and negative responses towards immigrant groups, affecting both social and economic aspects (Schmid, 2006). Jennifer Fredette's book *Constructing Muslims in France* (2014) addresses the gap between the local population and Muslim communities through interviews with Muslim minorities in France. The debate between Catholics and Republicans in France has played a crucial role in shaping national identity. Religion in France has become an ideology used as a tool for mass control, with the assumption that certain groups are vulnerable to extremist movements. Consequently, symbols, dress codes, and other aspects of Islam have incited hostility from anti-religious segments in France. There is a belief that an increase in visible Muslim presence in public spaces equates to greater religious influence and poses a threat to secularists (Muhammad, 2012). Thomas Deltombe notes that media portrayals of Islamophobia are often manipulated to stigmatize Islam, closely tied to political issues (Iza, 2022).

Policy on Banning Religious Symbols for Muslims

Islamophobia has increasingly manifested as racial discrimination against minority groups in France, driven by Western Orientalism and the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center, which heightened fears linking Muslims with terrorism. Western nations' sense of superiority has led to a perception of Eastern nations, including Muslims, as inferior, resulting in racial biases. Europeans often exhibit racist behavior and reject integration from non-Western cultures across various fields, including employment, education, and domestic life. According to the 2015 annual report by Collectif Contre L'Islamophobie en France (CCIF), 64% of Islamophobic actions in France were carried out by institutions, 34% by legal bodies, and 2% by individuals (Ismoyo, 2016). This Islamophobia in France is reinforced by the principle of secularism, specifically *laïcité*, which mandates the removal of religious elements from public spaces. Originally, laïcité aimed to separate church and state due to the church's excessive influence in France. This principle has been enshrined in several laws, including the December 9, 1905 Law on the Separation of Church and State (Esmano & Miranda, 2022). Laïcité also forms the basis for French public policy and has been used to establish the Loi concernant la Séparation des Églises et de l'État, which asserts that the state no longer recognizes any religious position (Aulia, 2020). The enforcement of laïcité in France, which bans religious symbols in public spaces, has led to discrimination, particularly against Muslims.

The July 7, 2005 bombings in London, which killed 53 people and were carried out by a Muslim youth, intensified hatred and negative perceptions of Muslims in

Europe, including France. This event sparked demonstrations by students urging the government to ban mosque construction in France and expressed support for Marine Le Pen of the National Rally party, known for her extreme nationalist policies. Le Pen, who competed with Emmanuel Macron in the 2017 French Presidential Election, is known for her controversial and discriminatory policies, including a proposed ban on hijabs in public spaces (Kumparanwomen, 2022).

The debate over banning hijabs in public spaces in France began in earnest after the 2001 WTC attacks. In 2004, the French Parliament passed a law banning hijabs in public spaces, both administrative and educational, leading to significant discrimination against Muslim women in France (Udasmoro, 2010). According to data from the Collectif Contre L'Islamophobie en France (CCIF) for 2015, 74% of discrimination against Muslims in France affected women, with 79% of the French population viewing headscarves or hijabs as obstacles to social cohesion (Ismoyo, 2016). The widespread rejection of hijabs is evident, with 93% of the population believing that hijab-wearing women have no place in France. This ban represents a form of religious repression, as the hijab is a religious obligation for Muslim women but is restricted to meet civil obligations in France. This situation has led to an ongoing identity crisis for Muslim women in France.

In addition to the hijab ban, on April 11, 2011, Jean-François Copé, then-President of the Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP), introduced the "Loi Contre La Burqa," which bans the wearing of burqas or full-body Islamic garments in public spaces. The burqa, an Arabic term for a full-body covering worn by Muslim women, is used to maintain modesty. However, the prohibition of both hijabs and burqas affects various aspects of employment, education, and daily life. Muslim women wearing these religious symbols face barriers in the workplace and educational settings. There have been cases of attacks on women wearing hijabs or burqas in public. Men with beards in France are also often unjustly associated with terrorism due to their Islamic faith.

In the 2017 French Presidential Election, Emmanuel Macron was seen as supportive of laïcité but not opposed to its principles. During his campaign, Macron promised to lift the ban on hijabs in schools and vowed to close places of worship promoting terrorism (Esmano & Miranda, 2022). Macron, formerly associated with the left-leaning Socialist Party and known for advocating freedom, equality, and reform, was expected to address religious discrimination in France, particularly against Muslims. His campaign's promise to reverse discriminatory policies contributed to his election. However, after taking office, Macron's administration reinforced *laïcité*, leading to ongoing discrimination against hijab-wearing women. Notably, in 2019, an incident involving a woman named Fatima, who was verbally attacked in the French Parliament for wearing a hijab, highlighted ongoing issues (Esmano & Miranda, 2022). In September 2023, Macron reiterated his commitment to enforcing a strict ban on hijabs and abayas in schools, despite public opposition, with law enforcement instructed to strictly enforce these regulations (Muslimahnews, 2023). This persistent situation reflects a troubling trend where secularism, intended to protect religious freedom from state interference, instead imposes significant restrictions on Islam in France.

Impact of the Ban on Religious Symbols

The ban on religious symbols in France has had significant effects on education and employment. Specifically, this ban impacts religious instruction in public schools and affects personal expression and identity, especially for Muslims wearing hijabs

(Indiraphasa, 2023). In the educational context, the prohibition of religious symbols has made it difficult for religion teachers to impart religious education freely. Furthermore, the ban affects personal dress and identity, particularly for Muslims who wear hijabs. This policy has also prompted protests and criticism from the Muslim community globally.

In the workplace, the ban on religious symbols impacts human rights and religious freedom. Muslims in France struggle to express their religious identity due to the ban, which can also affect their job opportunities, particularly for those wearing hijabs. This policy may lead to discrimination and inequity in the workplace. While private sector policies are more flexible, the ban still influences job choices and opportunities for Muslim women.

The ban also affects interfaith relations and social integration. It has sparked debates on tolerance, religious pluralism, and individual rights, and has exacerbated tensions between different religious groups in France. Additionally, this policy may reinforce Islamophobia, leading to increased prejudice and strained social cohesion. Overall, the ban on religious symbols in France has had complex and controversial consequences for education and employment, despite its intended goals of promoting social integration and secularism.

CONCLUSION

France is a secular nation that has also experienced Islamophobia. Known as laïcité, French secularism upholds the principles of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. The Muslim population in France, the largest in Europe, has grown due to globalization. However, this influx can be traced back to colonial history, with African immigrants contributing to the rise in the Muslim demographic in France. Muslims in France have faced discrimination from both local communities and the French government. The introduction of anti-separatism legislation has increasingly marginalized Muslim groups, restricting their activities. This issue is further exacerbated by international and national events involving radical elements claiming to act in the name of Islam. Various efforts have been made to address perceived radicalism among Muslims, often framing them as threats to national security.

Islamophobia has shaped perceptions and prejudices in France, with fears about the growing presence of Muslims in public spaces. This form of racism against minority groups complicates Muslims' access to employment, education, and other activities. The principle of *laïcité*, intended to separate state and religion, has instead led to discrimination. Proposals to ban religious symbols in public spaces have sparked significant debate and have adversely affected Muslims in France. The Islamic requirement for women to cover their hair with a hijab is contradicted by such bans, creating difficulties for Muslim women.

The "Loi Contre La Burqa" is one such policy that prohibits Muslim women from wearing burqas in public. This ban on religious symbols is considered a violation of human rights and religious freedoms, restricting the ability to express religious identity publicly. Additionally, the prohibition of religious symbols impacts interfaith relations and social integration, contributing to the rise of Islamophobia among the local population in France.

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